***ASJ**: International Journal of Health, Safety and Environment (IJHSE)*
Vol. 7 (02) 31 March, 2021, Pp. 765 – 788
www.academiascholarlyjournal.org/ijhse/index_ijhse.htm
ISSN: 2360-9311©Academia Scholarly Journals
Also Available@: Archive.org/Chika_Ebere_Odoemelam
Indexed in: International Institute_of_Organized_Research_(I2OR)_database
Open access

Full Length Research

# Framing the COVID-19 Health Pandemic: A Comparative Analysis of Six Nigerian Newspapers

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Accepted March 07, 2021

**Since January 2020, almost all the countries of the world have witnessed the outbreak of a global health pandemic like never before. This health pandemic, popularly known as COVID-19, has impacted negatively on the health, economic, social, and overall well-being of humanity globally. As a result, this study used content analysis to explore media framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in six Nigerian newspapers, namely, *Daily Post*, *The Daily Sun*, *The Nation*, *Premium Times, This Day, and Vanguard*. The research findings revealed that the six selected newspapers amplified the pandemic's coverage using the frames of economic issues, public healthcare crisis, health workers' strike, and corruption with different ferocity and salience. It was also found that the dominant news frames of economic issues, corruption, and public healthcare crisis received negative tone coverage across all the sampled papers at varying degrees. In contrast, the tones mostly used in framing the pandemic in the selected newspapers were positive, negative, and neutral tones. Thus, the study concluded that the media in Nigeria and elsewhere play a significant role in framing public health issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The author suggests that further studies should be focused on how media health-related messages in a pandemic influence the public's health behavior and impact the practices of small and medium business owners.**

**Keywords:** framing, Covid-19, newspapers, health pandemic.

## INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) China Country Office was informed on 31st December 2019 of pneumonia cases of unknown etiology (unknown cause) identified in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China (WHO, 2020b). The World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, at the time, assured the international community that he was working closely with the Chinese government to address the situation (Sun, 2020). As the virus quickly spread to Europe, the United States President, Donald Trump, on 30th January 2020, imposed a traveled ban on all flights from China entering the US.

Most world leaders saw the US president's action

As a racist act against China and her citizens. This condemnation was somehow unanimous. The world did not know that they would soon shut their on international airspace and land borders to save their citizens from contracting the disease. Since the declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020, there has been no adequately coordinated clarity on the management and care of patients by health professionals and disease control experts. Moreso, there was confusion and conflicting advice from government and professional organizations such as WHO, Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and Society for Obstetrics and Gynecology of Canada at the early stage of the pandemic outbreak (Zipursky, 2020).

According to Zipursky (2020), the management of coronavirus disease has led to unprecedented changes in the provision of care to patients worldwide. They further stated that much uncertainty remains about caring for pregnant women and their infants during the pandemic despite rapid scientific advancement. Similarly, Sohrabi et al., (2020) stated that COVID-19 is considered a relative of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). It is caused by a beta coronavirus named SARS CoV-2 that affects the lower respiratory tract and manifests as pneumonia in humans.

Unfortunately, Nigeria's first index case of COVID-19 was imported into the country on 27th February 2020 through an Italian citizen who returned to his job in Nigeria from Milan. The Italian man who works with Lafarge Cement Company in Ewekoro, Ogun State, South West of Nigeria, fell sick a few days after returning to the country. He was sent to Ewekoro Medical Center for the COVID-19 Test by the company's authorities and confirmed positive by the Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC) (NCDC, 2020a). Consequently, several cases were reported in Nigeria, especially among the political elites such as Abba Kyari, the late Chief of staff to the president, some state governors, and other top government functionaries. According to (NCDC, 2020a), Nigeria's political elites contributed to the spread of the disease in the country through flagrant abuse of health guidelines and social distancing and a minimum of 14 days of self-isolation for recent travelers from European countries and other high risk areas.

As of 31st October 2020, according to the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC, 2020b), Nigeria, Africa's largest country, has confirmed 62853 cases and 1144 deaths. However, these numbers are not reflections of the situation on the ground since testing is not done on a large scale due to a lack of appropriate testing kits. Moreover, globally the overall confirmed 31st October 2020 are 45.24 million and a death toll of 1,183 788. According to (WHO, 2020b), out of these numbers, the United States has the highest COVID-19 health pandemic 9,126, 361 million cases, and 230 556 deaths. The overall death toll of the COVID-19 health pandemic within its short span of existence is worrying compared to the Spanish flu of 1918, with an estimated 50 million deaths (WHO, 2020a).

Furthermore, as of 31st October 2020, all 52 countries in Africa recorded 1756 240 and a death toll of 29 275. Europe had 6,78734 with 340,182 deaths, while the Americas had 18 664035 and 675 435 deaths, and the Asian continent 7 522 411 with 125 185 deaths. Similarly, the Middle East had a cumulative case of 2,616 855 and 68 221 deaths, and the Western Pacific 695,822 with 13 732 deaths (NCDC, 2020b; WHO, 2020b). It is evident from the above casualty figures that the world was not prepared for a global pandemic of this nature. Effective and coordinated travel restrictions and quarantine measures above partisan politics would have been put in place immediately after the COVID-19 virus was detected in China. Nigeria thought it wise to place a travel ban on high-risk countries such as the United States, France, Germany, United Kingdom, South Korea, Norway, Italy, Iran, Japan, and other host nations on 28th March 2020. This ban and the uneven solution arrived relatively late in the country as many new arrivals had already mingled with the rural population. For this reason, the media is one way to stay interactive with our modern world society. Besides, communication and information dissemination are crucial in human interaction, sharing ideas, societal survival, and cultural continuity (Liu et al., 2018; Sillars and Vangelisti, 2018). Moreover, in liberal societies, the mass media is regarded as the "Fourth Estate of Realm," and watchdog of the society." This means that the media exist and functions as an organ of information dissemination, educational promotion and monitoring, social entertainment, mass mobilization, and public opinion builder. Consequently, the dissemination of ideas, images, and stories is often discussed under media power and influence, often called media effects. Understanding the media (newspapers) and its role in the coverage of

healthcare issues and other public concerns includes investigating how media influences information, viewpoints, perceptions, people, associations, organizations, and cultures. Thus, the press must analyze circumstances meticulously to better inform citizens of health issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The media must identify the disease's health threats that endanger people's lives and provide accurate information to educate the people about the virus.

After all, (Nandy and Nandy, 1997) argued that the media play a great role in health education as an integral part of public health and promote common health values via appropriate information. This means media are exceptional and powerful in their capacity to instigate comments, generate discussion and dialogue, and propose constructive ideas and solutions for promoting public health. Li et al. (2020a), observed that media health education is necessary because it can mitigate public health problems by presenting relevant health information and shared values. Therefore, media plays a decisive function in health education and awareness by offering critical information to deter and monitor emerging infectious diseases such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, (Shaw et al., 1997) also identify the media's powerful and influential role in news coverage and information dissemination. According to McCombs and Shaw, the media is powerful by setting-agenda, choosing news standards, creating awareness and gatekeeping news functions. However, the media in Nigeria, especially the selected six newspapers, should have been more outspoken in covering the novel virus when first detected in Wuhan, China, before it spread globally.

As a result, these attributes have positioned the media as a significant bridge between the government and the people. Consequently, in consideration of the trend of events and the media dynamics in handling the COVI-19 pandemic, this study conducted a content analysis of media framing of the virus in Nigeria. This study examined the pandemic's framing in six selected Nigerian newspapers, namely *Daily Post*, *The Daily Sun*, *The Nation*, *Premium Times, ThisDay, and Vanguard*. Thus, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To understand the kinds of frames used by the selected newspapers to cover the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria within the study period.
2. To understand the dominant frames used in the coverage of the pandemic in Nigeria within the study period.
3. To understand the tones of the frames used (positive, negative, neutral) in Nigeria's COVID-19 coverage within the study period.

**A Review of Related Literature for this Study**

Media framing shows and shapes how audiences react to news stories. It is all about how the mass media packages, constructs, and presents information to the public. According to (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015), framing was developed by Goffman in the early 1970s and drew from sociology, psychology, and communication. It addresses how issues are presented to the audience and how it influences people's choices about issues. In other words, framing contains messages about the audience, the messenger, the medium, and images. Framing is used mainly in terms of the waves of urgency the media places on information as published attracts public opinion through constructive and unconstructive criticism of the issues in question. The use of framing plays an essential role in the way concerns heard from the media are utilized by the audience. The strength of framing theory lies in how specific questions can be highlighted in the press while others are not. This quality of framing allows the media to make decisions on what people should be concerned about. Besides, framing entails ways and approaches used by the media to present information to the public to influence their views and perspectives on societal importance issues (Ciboh, 2017; Nwakpu et al., 2020; Okeke et al., 2019).

In general, framing is a concept concerned with constructing meaning (Browne et al., 2017). Similarly, according to Dahl (2017), the notion of framing concerns how individuals and groups organize, perceive, and communicate about the world. It is essential to state that framing plays a considerable role in our daily lives as individuals, groups, or collective members of society. Also, all around us, media messages such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other public concerns in Nigeria are being framed to make peoples think in a particular direction.

On the other hand, framing highlights the techniques and ways through which the media construct and present their information to society. According to Tolley et al. (2016), the media has always chosen to frame to simplify complex topics and make them easy to understand and comprehend by the audience. Thus, the media provide crucial

information that could sway public opinion, decisions, or views on such matters through framing (Abdulbaqi and Ariemu, 2017; Egbunike, 2015; Ezeji, 2018; Gambo, 2018). According to Entman (1993b), to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text. Also, framing promotes a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation for the items described (Entman, 2004; Scheufele, 2000). Thus, the media use framing to showcase how public significance issues are portrayed and messages presented to the mass audience for better understanding.

Furthermore, Wasike (2017) argues that framing involves emphasizing certain aspects of reality in a particular definition, interpretation, or evaluation. Besides, framing corresponds to the process, which implies a strategic selection (conscious or not) of language features for a purpose (Fløttum and Gjerstad, 2017; Kapranov, 2017). Through deploying frames, certain viewpoints are projected while others are silenced. For instance, particular words, metaphors, or images may be used repeatedly, rendering some ideas or views more salient or memorable and others less invisible (Naylor et al., 2017). The above arguments by Wasike, Kapranov, Naylor, and Flottum et al., show how the media acts as “gatekeepers” that organize and present ideas, events, issues, and topics the journalists cover daily. It is also interesting to note that journalists decide which frame to use to construct and present the information to the public members. As a result, newspapers frame the news such as the COVID-19 pandemic within a particular point of view, which changes the way readers or the public perceives it. Also, it is essential to state that newspapers prioritize the news items and highlight them according to the editorial policies of their various news organizations. Moreover, Princen (2018) argued that framing an issue can form various perspectives with multiple value implications. In other words, framing enables people “to see that the same events make different kinds of sense depending upon the frame applied” (Geise, 2017).

In this case, highlighting parts of a message can shape how the audience interprets it and make people always strive to make the most rational choices possible. The news media use different kinds of frames, such as episodic and thematic. Episodic frames are commonly news reports that show public matters such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which focuses on individuals at a particular location and specific times (Feezell et al., 2019; Shah, 2019; Springer and Harwood, 2015). On the contrary, thematic frames put huge public issues on a broader perspective by emphasizing general conditions (Hengelaar et al., 2018; Mato, 2012; Shah, 2019). However, in terms of framing tones, the kinds of frames and tones used in framing the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, understanding the power of news is crucial. Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017) identified factors that influence frame patterns. Thus, the outbreak of a disease such as the COVID-19 pandemic could create a news media frame. Hence, the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus has broadened the Nigerian media use of specific frames to discuss and present the disease to the public.

Also, framing has benefitted from well-established frame categorization generalized across issues. Boydstun et al., (2013) believed that people who consume stories about poverty framed episodically by focusing on unemployed individuals are more likely to blame poverty on individual failure. People who consume thematic poverty stories focused on national unemployment tend to blame the government for the poverty rate. Other frame categories are issue-specific, innocence, and policy-based issues. The issue-specific frame provides details about the subject matter, and the innocence frame is related to the provision of evidence, due process, classism, and racism. In contrast, the innocence frame is related to the provision of evidence, due process, classism, and racism. The policy-based frame is related to foreign relations, abortions, and immigration issues.

Besides, framing was also used as a guide to explore the research objectives of this study. Hence, this study adopted Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) position on framing. According to Semetko and Valkenburg, there are predetermined news frames present in a news story. Also, how these frames are presented in the news media determines the outcome of public opinion. Thus, framing refers to the ways mass media construct and present their news or information to the mass audience. Also, framing refers to how mass audiences utilize the data from the media when making decisions. In other words, recipients of news stories build their individual opinions based on how they are framed and presented. In short, framing is, on the one hand, about the interplay between news frame construction and presentation and is on the other, about audiences’ understanding, which determines

decision making.

For this reason, the COVID-19 pandemic could be suitable to ascertain the kinds of frames and tones used in the coverage of the virus among the selected newspapers in Nigeria. This is reasonable since the virus's emergence has generated enormous media coverage, provoking many public reactions. Hence, the way media have presented and shaped the discussion on the COVID-19 pandemic is fundamental to the media since the pandemic is an event that is tied to a protracted global disease.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study relied on the framing theory of the media. Framing theory allows the media to assemble messages and explain them based on specific patterns of emphasis and exclusion deemed newsworthy. Consequently, framing theory is sometimes ascribed as second-level Agenda-Setting theory because it is in proximity to Agenda-Setting. The notion of framing involves how the mass media construct and present information to the general public to sway public opinion about a particular news event. It helps individuals and groups organize, perceive, and communicate about the world and plays a considerable role in our daily lives. According to McLeod and Shah (2015), framing theory also explains "how messages from the media," based on specific patterns of emphasis and exclusion, can shape the thinking of the people who encounter them.

Also, Wasike (2017) argues that framing involves emphasizing certain aspects of reality in the context of a particular definition, interpretation, or evaluation. Thus, in framing, the media devote a substantial amount of space and time to the coverage of a specific issue or event. Through deploying frames, certain viewpoints are projected by the media while others are silenced. The media use particular words, metaphors, or images repeatedly, rendering some ideas or views more salient or memorable and others less invisible (Fløttum and Gjerstad, 2017; Kapranov, 2017; Naylor et al., 2017). Besides framing tone, most news media reports significantly lean towards negative than positive coverage of the events in question (Crow and Lawlor, 2016; Greenslade, 2015).

Thus, it is evident that the media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic caused fear and uncertainty by focusing immensely on the spread of the virus globally. In this circumstance, there is a connection between our study and the framing theory. This is because the media frame the stories and such news stories depend on the media, which predict issues such as the COVIDS-19 pandemic.

**METHODOLOGY**

According to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), there are two main approaches to confirm news frames' existence using content analysis. The first approach is the inductive approach. An inductive process involves analyzing a news story with an open view, trying to reveal possible frames. This research method's merit lies in the unobstructed view to ensuring that no frame will go unnoticed. However, it is time-consuming, difficult to replicate, and for the most part, based on a small sample. The second approach is the deductive framing method. This method allows frames to be extracted theoretically from literature and coded in standard content analysis. This approach requires a clear idea of frames that should be in the study. The advantages of this approach are; it is replicable, can manage large samples, and quickly detects differences in framing between media and within media. For this study, the author adopted the deductive method.

**Study Design**

This study applied quantitative content analysis to six (6) Nigerian newspapers, namely, *Daily Post, The Daily Sun, The Nation*. *Premium Times, ThisDay, and The Vanguard.*

**Study Duration**

The scope of the study was from 01 January 2020-30 September 2020. The reason for the selection of the study period was due to rising cases of coronavirus in Nigeria. Another reason was the high level of discussion about the pandemic at the time, especially among the educated.

**Study Population**

The population size of this study is 396 purposively-sampled six Nigerian newspaper publications. The analysis unit was the individual news reports on the COVID-19 pandemic, such as straight news, opinion pieces, editorials, and features articles written by medical experts about the virus.

## Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling technique was used to illustrate the newspaper sample for this study from the six selected newspapers: *Daily Post*, *The Daily Sun, The Nation,* Premium Times, *ThisDay*, and *The Vanguard.* These newspapers were chosen for several reasons. The newspapers were chosen based on multiple reasons; First, they have a wider circulation. Secondly, they maintain correspondence offices in all the thirty-six (36) states of Nigeria. Thirdly, they are readily available. Fourthly, they cover different kinds of national and international issues, and lastly, their ownership is ethnically-based.

## Study Procedures

Every Monday-Sunday was chosen as a sample because they are the days when the selected six newspapers publish COVID-19 news stories. Therefore, the author conducted a Google and Website search of *Daily Post*, *The Daily Sun*, *The Nation*, *Premium Times, ThisDay*, and *The Vanguard* to observe the virus's coverage within the study period. The study search was based on news story coverage around the COVID-19 pandemic using phrases like " media framing of COVID-19" and "media framing of coronavirus." The researcher also searched stories using keywords such as "COVID-19" for each of the selected newspapers within the study period.

## Data Analysis

Every page of *Daily Post, The Daily Sun, The Nation*, *Premium Times, ThisDay, and The Vanguard* newspapers were reviewed to observe a report on the COVID-19 pandemic within the study period bearing in mind the Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) deductive news frame analysis method. According to Semetko and Valkengur (2000), a deductive framing method is a technique whereby frames are extracted theoretically from literature and coded in standard content analysis. As a result, this research analyzed the virus's coverage in the six selected newspapers using the deductive framing method. Thus, twelve news frames were extracted from *Daily Post, The Daily Sun, The Nation*, *Premium Times, ThisDay, and The Vanguard* newspapers. The frames as shown in Table 1 are; (1) Economic Issues (2) Public Health Crisis (3) Herbal Remedies (4) Corruption (5) Vaccines (6) Health Workers Strike (7) Elite Politicians Disease (8) Donations (9) Causes (10) Prevention Signs (11) Morality (12) Regulations. The author considered that a high number on the frequency of economic issues frame shows that the newspapers reported the problem in terms of costs or monetary consequences on groups, individuals, and the country. Also, a high number of public healthcare crisis frames' frequency reveals that the story mentioned the rise in poor healthcare infrastructure, sanitation, and the inefficient healthcare delivery system in the country. In like manner, a high number on the herbal remedies frequency depicts the news reports of claims of local herbs or drugs that could cure the COVIS-19 by Nigerian traditional medicine operators. A high number on the corruption frame frequency means that it is the primary reason for ill-equipped hospitals, poor sanitation, and good governance.

Besides, a high number on the vaccine frame frequency shows that the news report referred to possible manufacturing or procuring of vaccines, drugs, and other medications to contain, slow down, and eliminate the virus. A high number of healthcare workers' strike frame frequency reveals disagreements or misunderstandings between parties, individuals, and groups due to lack of financial resources to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, many elite politicians' disease frequency frames depict deaths associated with top government officials or political elites due to the COVID-19 virus. Just as (Entman, 1993a) added that frames in the news could be observed and identified "by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stocked phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments." Numerous studies (Evers, 2016; Gronemeyer and Porath, 2017; Jubril, 2019; Kung, 2017; Thirumalaiah and Aram, 2017) applied the deductive approach to their study and analysis media of issues.

Consequently, during the coding process, the author paid particular attention to COVID-19 news stories from sources such as editorials, feature articles, straight news, and opinion articles. This was followed by an initial coding framework created to distinguish news stories based on study purpose, approach, and findings. As indicated by the content analysis method for this study, the data obtained from each newspaper were regularly evaluated for reanalysis by the author who coded them, as suggested by (Krippendorff, 2011). The researcher

**Table 1.** Showing the Content Categories of the Frames Used By the Selected Newspapers in the coverage of the COVID-19 Pandemic Coverage.

| S/N | **Frame Categories** | **Frame Definition** |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Economic Issues | This frame reports an event, problem in terms of costs, financial or monetary consequences on groups, individuals, regions, or country. |
| 2 | Public Healthcare Crisis | Healthcare access and effectiveness, illness, disease, sanitation, obesity, mental health effects, prevention of or perpetuation of gun violence, infrastructure, and building safety |
| 3 | Herbal Remedies | These frames entail news reports of claims of local herbs or drugs that could cure the COVIS-19 by Nigerian traditional medicine operators. |
| 4 | Corruption | These news reports blame corruption as an ugly trend that has be-devilled and militates against rapid economic growth and development. It is the primary reason for ill-equipped hospitals, undermines public trusts, good governance, and primarily distorts public policy and plan, resulting in misappropriation of resources meant for the nation's shared prosperity. |
| 5 | Vaccines | This frame covers information about possible manufacturing or procuring of vaccines, drugs, and other medications needed to contain, slow down, and total elimination of the virus by health experts/ scientists. |
| 6 | Health Workers Strike | The lack of or availability of physical, geographical, spatial, human and financial resources or the capacity of existing systems and resources to implement or carry out policy goals. |
| 7 | Elite Politicians Disease | Any death associated with top government officials or political elites due to the COVID-19. Lack of adequate healthcare facilities in the country. Deaths of politicians to the closure of air space by developed countries due to COVID-19. These politicians died because they did not build good hospitals and other public health facilities that meet their needs and ordinary citizens. The COVID-19 was hard on them because most of them had underlying health conditions that could not be treated in Nigeria due to poor health infrastructures. |
| 8 | Donations | This frame puts into perspective donations from individuals, groups, and corporate organizations towards containing the COVID-19 pandemic, such as face masks, monetary contributions, hand sanitizers, hospital beds, and even quarantine stations. |
| 9 | Causes | This frame entails suggestions and references to known and unknown causes of COVID-19 among the various demographics. |
| 10 | Prevention Signs | These are suggestions and information from medical professionals about ways to contain the virus's spread, such as social distancing, frequent hand washing, maintaining a high degree of hygiene, wearing face masks, sanitizers, and avoiding crowded areas. |
| 11 | Morality | This frame put an issue, event, or problem in the context of religious tenets or moral perspectives. |
| 12 | Regulations | Here specific government policies, rules, and enforcement are enacted to forestall law and order breakdown. It prescribes punishment for offenders. |

recruited one (1) trained coder to enhance the consistency, accuracy, and validity of the study results during the coding process, as indicated by (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). The coding objective was to identify each sampled paper's news frame types to cover the COVID-19 health pandemic. Both

the author and the other coder agreed on the final result achieved.

Furthermore, the researcher used Chi-square statistical for this study. A Chi-square test was used to test whether there is a meaningful association between newspapers and news frames in the bivariate data. This Test of independence was achieved using the crosstab feature in SPPS software. Before the Chi-square test, news frames (Economic Issues, Public Health Crisis, Herbal Remedies, Corruption, Vaccines, Health Workers Strike, Elite Politicians Disease, Donations, Causes. Prevention Sign, Morality, and Regulations) were encoded as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 respectively. Calculating the Chi-square statistic allowed the author to measure the significant difference between the observed cell counts and the expected cell counts.

**Frame Tones**

A. Positive Tones: Frames that give encouraging and supportive opinions about the COVID-19 pandemic
B. Negative Tones: These are frames that give discouraging and non-supportive remarks about the COVID-19 pandemic.
C. Neutral Tones: These are news stories, articles, or editorials that neither described the COVID-19 pandemic in positive or negative tones.

## FINDINGS

The study found 2661 frames related to the COVID-19 pandemic through the search frames explained in the methodology. These frames combine straight news stories, features, editorials, and opinion articles that encompassed the keywords, sentences, or phrases from 01st January 2020- 30th September 2020. Table 1 shows the content categories of the *Daily Post's* frames*, The Daily Sun*, *The Nation*, *Premium Times*, *This Day*, and *The Vanguard* newspapers in the coverage of the COVID-19 virus.

### Research Questions

1. To understand the kinds of frames used by the selected newspapers to cover the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria within the study period.

Table 2 revealed the types, number, and frequency of frames used by the *Daily Post* newspapers in reporting the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper used a total number of 336 frames to cover the virus within the nine (9) months of this study. Overall, 71 stories about the virus were framed as Economic Issues, 55 stories were framed as Public Health Crises. In contrast, the least frame used was Vaccines with two (2) frames. Table 2 indicates that the *Daily Post* newspaper recorded the highest number of frames with 71 as Economic Issues (21.1%), 55 as Public Healthcare Crisis (16.4%), 45 as corruption (13.4%) of frames related to the COVID-19 virus. However, the least number of frames recorded by the *Daily Post* are Vaccines with 2 (0.6%) and Herbal Remedies with 3 (0.9%) relating to the COVID-10 virus. The data described in Tables 2 and 3 and the bar chart in Figure 1 show that the *Daily Post* newspaper covered the pandemic and framed it according to their news organizations' understanding and viewpoints. In this case, *The Daily Post* used more economic issues, public health crises, and corruption frames to cover the pandemic. The use of more economic issues frames may be partially attributed to the people's economic hardship due to the Federal Government's closure and lockdown to contain the virus. On the other hand, the use of more public health crisis and corruption frames could be the inability of Nigerian hospitals and other public health facilities to cope with health crises due to inadequate funding and dilapidated medical infrastructures due to endemic corruption.

**Research Question 1.** To understand the kinds of frames used by the selected newspapers to cover the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria within the study period.

Table 3 shows the types and number of frames used by the *Daily Sun* newspaper to cover the COVID-19 virus. The results indicate that *The Daily Sun* used a total of 730 frames in their coverage of the virus. Thus, the breakdown shows that 245 Economic Issues, 78 Public Healthcare Crises, ten (10) Herbal Remedies, 82 corruption, and 22 vaccine frames to cover the COVID-19 virus within the study period. *The Daily Sun* also used 51 Health Workers Strike, 65 Elite Politicians Diseases, 26 Donations, and 25 Causes to frame the disease. Similarly, 40 Prevention Signs, five (5) Morality, and 81 Regulation frames were also used to report news on the pandemic.

The findings from Table 3 and Figure 2 also indicate that the frame of the Economic issues

**Table 2**. Showing the kinds and frequency of frames used by the *Daily Post* Newspaper in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

| Frames * Newspapers Crosstabulation | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Newspapers | |
| | | | The Daily Post | Total |
| Frames | Economic Issues | Count | 71 | 71 |
| | | % of Total | 21.1% | 21.1% |
| | Public Healthcare Crisis | Count | 55 | 55 |
| | | % of Total | 16.4% | 16.4% |
| | Herbal Remedies | Count | 3 | 3 |
| | | % of Total | 0.9% | 0.9% |
| | Corruption | Count | 45 | 45 |
| | | % of Total | 13.4% | 13.4% |
| | Vaccines | Count | 2 | 2 |
| | | % of Total | 0.6% | 0.6% |
| | Health Workers Strike | Count | 25 | 25 |
| | | % of Total | 7.4% | 7.4% |
| | Elite Politicians Disease | Count | 48 | 48 |
| | | % of Total | 14.3% | 14.3% |
| | Donations | Count | 16 | 16 |
| | | % of Total | 4.8% | 4.8% |
| | Causes | Count | 22 | 22 |
| | | % of Total | 6.5% | 6.5% |
| | Prevention Signs | Count | 15 | 15 |
| | | % of Total | 4.5% | 4.5% |
| | Morality | Count | 4 | 4 |
| | | % of Total | 1.2% | 1.2% |
| | Regulations | Count | 30 | 30 |
| | | % of Total | 8.9% | 8.9% |
| Total | | Count | 336 | 336 |
| | | % of Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

dominates COVID-19 news coverage in *The Daily Sun* with 245 (33.6%), followed by the Public healthcare crisis 78 (10.7%), and Herbal remedies 10 (1.4%). The corruption frame was used for 82 (11.2%), Vaccines 22 (3.0%), Health Workers Strike 52 (7.0%), and Elite politicians disease 65 (8.9%). The Donations frames were used 26 (3.6%), Causes 25 (3.4%), Prevention signs 40 (5.5%). Morality 5 (0.7%), and Regulations 81 (11.1%) within the study period. The analysis described above reflects that journalists working in *The Daily Sun* used more economic issues, public healthcare crises, corruption, elite politicians, and regulations frames to cover the COVID-19 pandemic.

Consequently, the interaction between the journalists and the use of frames of economic issues, regulations, and corruption to frame the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, could mean they were used more extensively in *The Daily Sun* compared to the frames of morality and herbal remedies. Hence, journalists working in *The Daily Sun* newspaper are not sometimes ready to criticize the government or healthcare providers based on morality or advise them to consider using herbal remedies as a possible solution to curb the spread of the virus for the sake of keeping their job. Table 4 and Figure 3 also reveals a dissection of the number and types of frames used by The Nation newspaper to reporting the COVID-19 pandemic. After a thorough review, the study analyzed 322 news frames from January 01-September 30, 2020. The findings show that *The Nation* used 95 (29.5%) economic issues, 37

**Table 3**. Showing the kinds and frequency of frames used by the *Daily Sun* Newspaper in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

| Frames * Newspapers Crosstabulation | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Newspapers | |
| | | | The Daily Sun | Total |
| Frames | Economic Issues | Count | 245 | 245 |
| | | % of Total | 33.6% | 33.6% |
| | Public Healthcare Crisis | Count | 78 | 78 |
| | | % of Total | 10.7% | 10.7% |
| | Herbal Remedies | Count | 10 | 10 |
| | | % of Total | 1.4% | 1.4% |
| | Corruption | Count | 82 | 82 |
| | | % of Total | 11.2% | 11.2% |
| | Vaccines | Count | 22 | 22 |
| | | % of Total | 3.0% | 3.0% |
| | Health Workers Strike | Count | 51 | 51 |
| | | % of Total | 7.0% | 7.0% |
| | Elite Political Disease | Count | 65 | 65 |
| | | % of Total | 8.9% | 8.9% |
| | Donations | Count | 26 | 26 |
| | | % of Total | 3.6% | 3.6% |
| | Causes | Count | 25 | 25 |
| | | % of Total | 3.4% | 3.4% |
| | Prevention Signs | Count | 40 | 40 |
| | | % of Total | 5.5% | 5.5% |
| | Morality | Count | 5 | 5 |
| | | % of Total | 0.7% | 0.7% |
| | Regulations | Count | 81 | 81 |
| | | % of Total | 11.1% | 11.1% |
| Total | | Count | 730 | 730 |
| | | % of Total | 100.0% | 100.0 % |

(11.5%) public healthcare crisis, 21 (6.5%) herbal remedies, and 33 (10.2%) corruption frames to report the COVID-19 virus. Other frames used by *The Nations* newspaper to report the COVID-19 virus include healthcare workers strike 28 (8.7%), elite politicians disease 30 (9.5%), donations 15 (4.7%), causes 11 (3.4%), prevention signs 12 (3.7%), morality 3 (0.9%), and regulations 25 (7.8%).

Using of more economic issues frames in *The Nation* newspaper to cover the COVID-19 by journalists may partly be, for example, due to a spike in the spread of the virus and the lockdown imposed by the government, which affected the means of survival of the people. This situation may have contributed to the emotional trauma and other human health impacts the people faced in various states because of the pandemic. Also, more use of the economic issues frames shows the magnitude of sufferings individuals and groups are going through due to the COVID-19. Similarly, a more public healthcare crisis frame could suggest that journalists do their utmost best to highlight the country's poor health infrastructure. It could also indicate the need for the government to give urgent attention to healthcare infrastructures.

A summary of the number and types of frames used to cover the COVID-19 pandemic in the *Premium Times* from 01st January- 30th September 2020 is shown in Table 5. The study thoroughly reviewed 447 frames used by the paper within the study period. The results revealed that the frames of economic issues were used 125 times to cover the virus, public

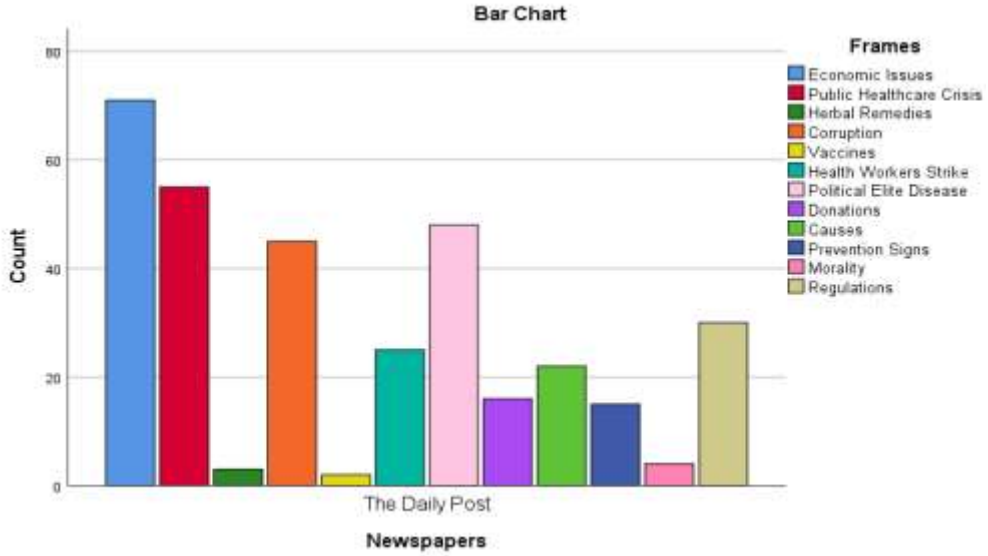


**Figure 1.** Showing the Bar chart of the kinds of frames Used by the *Daily Post* Newspaper in the Coverage of the COVID-9 Pandemic from 01st January- 30th September 2020.

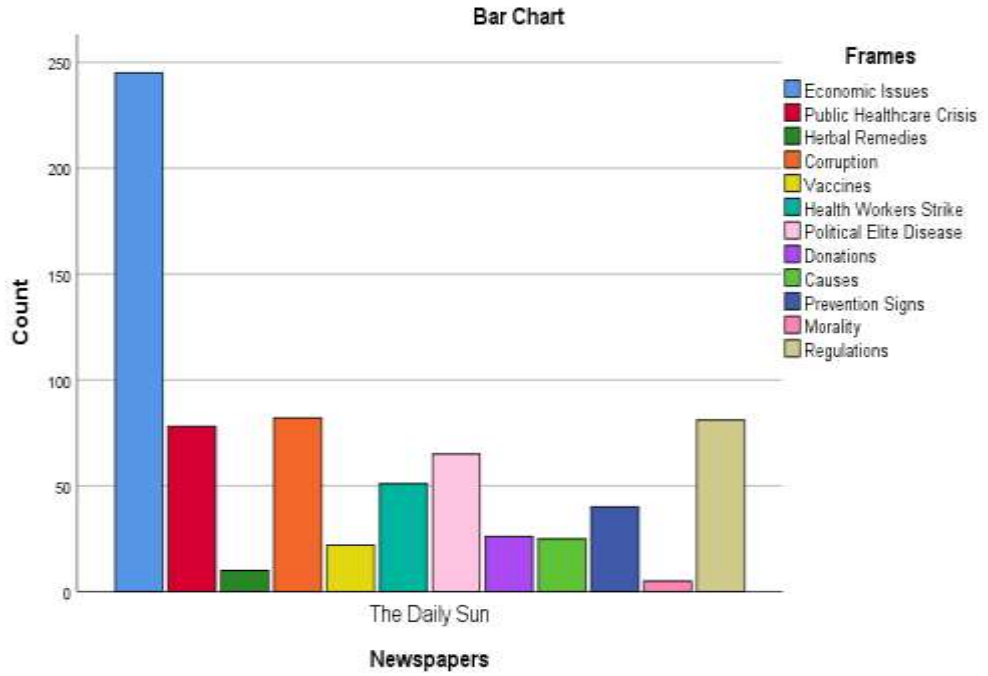


**Figure 2.** Showing the Bar chart of the kinds of Frames Used by *The Daily Sun* Newspaper in the Coverage of the COVID-9 Pandemic from 01st January- 30th September 2020

healthcare crisis 64, herbal remedies 18, and corruption 53. The morality frame was used the least with zero (0) in the same year. The paper also used vaccine frames 11, health worker strike 50, elite politicians disease 42, donations 22, cause 10, prevention signs 20, and regulations 29. The least

**Table 4**. Showing the kinds and frequency of frames used by the *Nation* Newspaper in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

| Frames * Newspapers Crosstabulation | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Newspapers | |
| | | | The Nation | Total |
| Frames | Economic Issues | Count | 95 | 95 |
| | | % of Total | 29.5% | 29.5% |
| | Public Healthcare Crisis | Count | 37 | 37 |
| | | % of Total | 11.5% | 11.5% |
| | Herbal Remedies | Count | 21 | 21 |
| | | % of Total | 6.5% | 6.5% |
| | Corruption | Count | 33 | 33 |
| | | % of Total | 10.2% | 10.2% |
| | Vaccines | Count | 12 | 12 |
| | | % of Total | 3.7% | 3.7% |
| | Health Workers Strike | Count | 28 | 28 |
| | | % of Total | 8.7% | 8.7% |
| | Political Elite Disease | Count | 30 | 30 |
| | | % of Total | 9.3% | 9.3% |
| | Donations | Count | 15 | 15 |
| | | % of Total | 4.7% | 4.7% |
| | Causes | Count | 11 | 11 |
| | | % of Total | 3.4% | 3.4% |
| | Prevention Signs | Count | 12 | 12 |
| | | % of Total | 3.7% | 3.7% |
| | Morality | Count | 3 | 3 |
| | | % of Total | 0.9% | 0.9% |
| | Regulations | Count | 25 | 25 |
| | | % of Total | 7.8% | 7.8% |
| Total | | Count | 322 | 322 |
| | | % of Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

used frame by the *Premium Times* newspaper in the coverage of the COVID-19 virus was the morality with 3. The findings in Table 5 and Figure 4 show that journalists are not doing enough to cover their pandemic. It might also be viewed from the angle of the numerous challenges faced by health workers and other frontline health officials due to dilapidated health infrastructures scattered all over the country. For instance, the public healthcare crisis and health workers strike 11.2% was used in the *Premium Times* from January 01-September 30, 2020. It could also signify a lack of robust health institutions journalists face and even its social implications to the entire citizenry (García-Gómez, 2011; Sullivan, 2019).

Table 6, Figure 5 also reveal a dissection of the number and kinds of frames used by *ThisDay* newspaper to report the COVID-19 virus outbreak in Nigeria from January 01-September 30, 2020. After a thorough review, the study analyzed 421 publications of the paper from within the study period. The results show that *ThisDay* used 118 economic issues, 40 public healthcare crises, 20 herbal remedies, 42 corruption, 33 vaccines, and 39 health workers strike frames to report its pandemic. Furthermore, 31 elite politicians' diseases, 28 donations, 18 causes, 27 prevention signs, four (4) morality, and 21 regulations were also used to frame the virus within the study period by *ThisDay* newspaper.

The use of more economic issues (28.0%) frame in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in *ThisDay newspaper* by journalists within the study period may partially be, for example, due to a spike in lockdowns by various state governments as a way to contain the spread of the virus. This situation may have contributed to the emotional trauma and economic hardship faced by ordinary Nigerians who struggle to make a living every day. Moreover, less use of the

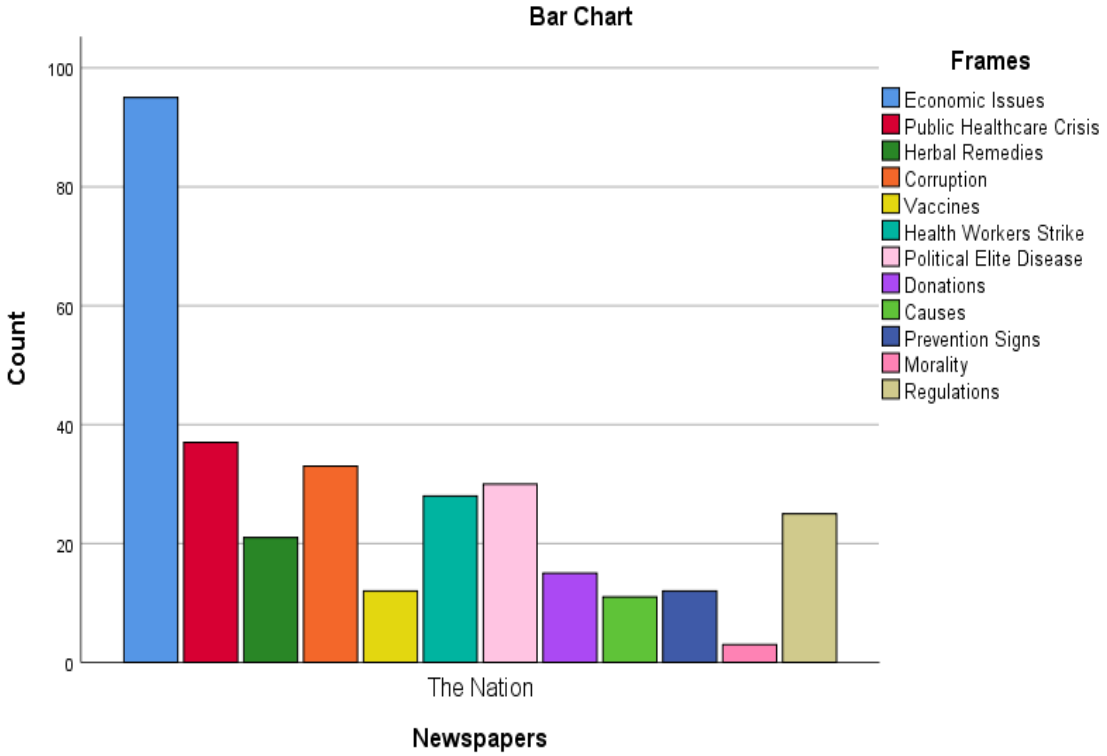


**Figure 3.** Showing the Bar chart of the kinds of Frames Used by the *Nation* Newspaper in the Coverage of the COVID-9 Pandemic from 01st January- 30th September 2020

public healthcare crisis (9.5%) and the health workers strike (9.3%) frames in the coverage of the virus outbreak could indicate journalists tried to avoid exposing the magnitude of rot in the country's health industry. However, the result also depicts that the morality (1.0%) frame was the least used in *ThisDa*y newspaper, as journalists find it challenging to give moral messages while maintaining journalistic neutrality.

A summary of the number and kinds of frames used to cover the COVID-19 pandemic in the *Vanguard* from January 01-September 30, 2020, is shown in Tables 12, 13, and Figure 6. The study thoroughly reviewed 405 publications of the paper within the study period. The results depicted that the economic issue frame was used 129 times to cover the virus, public healthcare crisis 50, herbal remedies 13, corruption 51, vaccine 15, and health workers strike 40. Besides, elite politicians' disease frames were used 39 times, donations 12, causes 14, prevention signs 10, morality 2, and regulations 30 within the same year.

Furthermore, the same Table 7 and Figure 6 Indicate that the *Vanguard* newspaper used the economic issues (31.9%), public healthcare crisis (12.3%), and corruption (12.6%) frames more than the other frames within the study period. Similarly, the frame of the economic issue that journalists most used might be due to the government and other relevant stakeholders' inability to agree on when to lift the ban on lockdown and returned life to normalcy. Overall, the morality frame was used the least with two (0.5%) in the same months under review. The causes (3.5%), vaccines (3.7%), prevention (2.5%), regulations (7.4%), and elites politicians' diseases were also highlighted less in the *Vanguard* newspaper. This may be due to the lack of exemplary behaviour and non-adherence to public health safety rules and regulations by government officials and political elites that violate these rules daily. Also, the poverty situations of the country, and corruption at high levels of government, and other uncertainties faced by the people due to the COVID-19 pandemic may explain the less use of donations (3.0%) and herbal remedies (3.2%) frames in the *Vanguard* within the study period.

**Table 5**. Showing the kinds and frequency of frames used by the *Premium Times* Newspaper in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

| Frames * Newspapers Crosstabulation | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Newspapers | |
| | | | Premium Times | Total |
| Frames | Economic Issues | Count | 125 | 125 |
| | | % of Total | 28.0% | 28.0% |
| | Public Healthcare Crisis | Count | 64 | 64 |
| | | % of Total | 14.3% | 14.3% |
| | Herbal Remedies | Count | 18 | 18 |
| | | % of Total | 4.0% | 4.0% |
| | Corruption | Count | 53 | 53 |
| | | % of Total | 11.9% | 11.9% |
| | Vaccines | Count | 11 | 11 |
| | | % of Total | 2.5% | 2.5% |
| | Health Workers Strike | Count | 50 | 50 |
| | | % of Total | 11.2% | 11.2% |
| | Political Elite Disease | Count | 42 | 42 |
| | | % of Total | 9.4% | 9.4% |
| | Donations | Count | 22 | 22 |
| | | % of Total | 4.9% | 4.9% |
| | Causes | Count | 10 | 10 |
| | | % of Total | 2.2% | 2.2% |
| | Prevention Signs | Count | 20 | 20 |
| | | % of Total | 4.5% | 4.5% |
| | Morality | Count | 3 | 3 |
| | | % of Total | 0.7% | 0.7% |
| | Regulations | Count | 29 | 29 |
| | | % of Total | 6.5% | 6.5% |
| Total | | Count | 447 | 447 |
| | | % of Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

2. To understand the dominant frames used in the pandemic coverage in Nigeria within the study period.

The study investigated whether dominant frames exist in the distribution of frames among the six (6) selected newspapers for this study, as shown in Figure 7, using SPSS Chi-Square Test analysis. The findings indicate that *The Daily Sun* newspaper dominates news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic using various frames 730 times than the *Premium Times* with 447, followed by *This Day* 421 times. *The Vanguard* newspaper used the various frames 405 times, the *Daily Post* 336, and *The Nation* 322 to cover the pandemic within the study's months. Thus from Tables 2-13, the economic issues frames dominate and received the most intensity of approach in *the Daily Post, The Daily Sun, The Nation, Premium Times, This Day, and the Vanguard* newspapers in the coverage of the COVID-19 virus for the nine (9) months period of this study. This could also mean that the COVID-19 pandemic has provoked both demand and supply shake-ups that echoed across the world's economy. This conceivably clarifies why Nisbet (2009) concludes

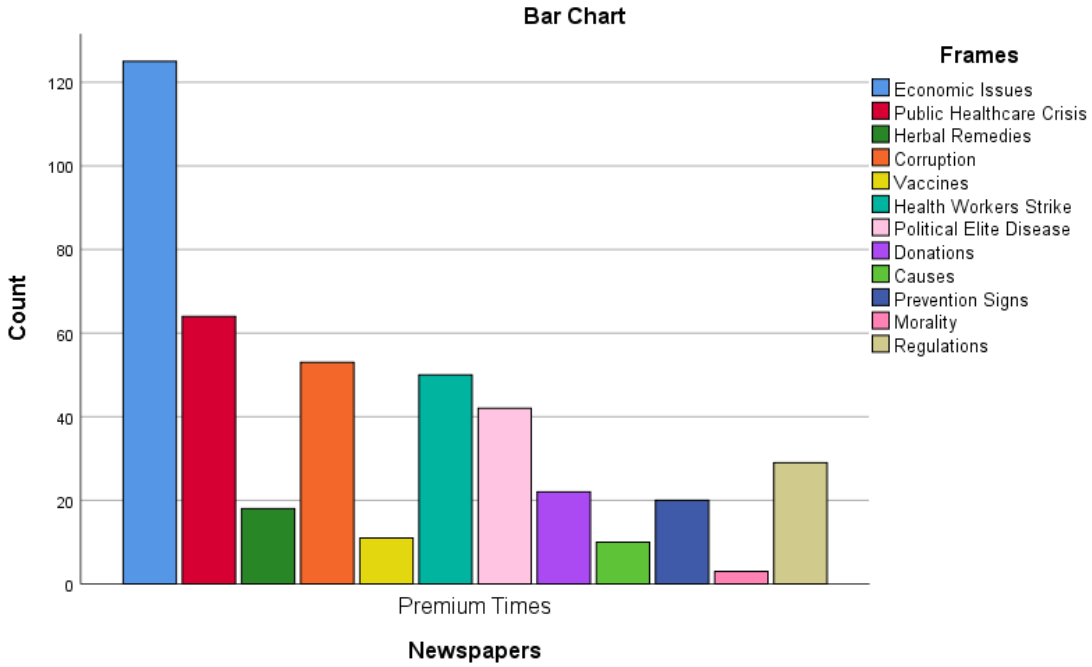


**Figure 4.** Showing the Bar chart of the kinds of Frames Used by the *Premium Times Newspaper* in the Coverage of the COVID-9 Pandemic from 01st January- 30th September 2020.

that framing incorporates an essential part of the media that contributes to shaping audience views and societal disposition to issues covered by the media.

3. To understand the tones of the frames used (positive, negative, neutral) in Nigeria's COVID-19 coverage within the study period.

Table 8 and Figure 8 show the tones of the frames used by the selected six (6) newspapers to cover the COVID-19 virus. Based on the result, all This Day newspaper had more positive tones with 108 (69.9%) than all the other papers sampled for this study. All six (6) papers used more negative tones than positive and neutral tones in their pandemic coverage. For instance, *The Daily Sun* used 627, *Premium Times* 373, *Vanguard* 353, *This Day* 309, *Daily Post* 296, and *The Nation* 259 negative tones in their reports of the COVID-19 in nine (9) months of the study than the positive or neutral tones. Consequently, the six selected newspapers' use of various tones to frame the COVID-19 virus suggests their audience's differences, determining how such issues are framed and presented to the people.

Another example is that a high score on the scale of negative tones shows that some government officials, groups, and individuals are responsible for the spike in spreading the virus in the country. This might also be a result of non-adherence to health safety procedures issued by health experts. A low score on the neutral tone scale reveals journalists' unwillingness to criticize powerful government officials or individuals who do not obey health professionals' safety advice. The above analysis shows the media, regardless of locality, are often influenced by the seriousness of the issue and how it affects the country. This is evident in the tones of the six (6) selected newspapers having more negative tones than positive and neutral tones in their coverage of the COVID-19 virus. As shown in Tables 2-8 and Figures 1-8, the significance of these findings is that despite the six selected newspapers' efforts in framing stories about the COVID-19 virus, a lot needs to be done to gain the support of everyone. This has become necessary since most of the selected newspapers' stories are negative, economic, and political. This study's findings agree with (Greenslade, 2015) who argued that most media leans towards the negative than the positive.

**Table 6**. Showing the kinds and frequency of frames used by the *ThisDay* Newspaper in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

| Frames * Newspapers Crosstabulation | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Newspapers | |
| | | | This Day | Total |
| Frames | Economic Issues | Count | 118 | 118 |
| | | % of Total | 28.0% | 28.0% |
| | Public Healthcare Crisis | Count | 40 | 40 |
| | | % of Total | 9.5% | 9.5% |
| | Herbal Remedies | Count | 20 | 20 |
| | | % of Total | 4.8% | 4.8% |
| | Corruption | Count | 42 | 42 |
| | | % of Total | 10.0% | 10.0% |
| | Vaccines | Count | 33 | 33 |
| | | % of Total | 7.8% | 7.8% |
| | Health Workers Strike | Count | 39 | 39 |
| | | % of Total | 9.3% | 9.3% |
| | Political Elite Disease | Count | 31 | 31 |
| | | % of Total | 7.4% | 7.4% |
| | Donations | Count | 28 | 28 |
| | | % of Total | 6.7% | 6.7% |
| | Causes | Count | 18 | 18 |
| | | % of Total | 4.3% | 4.3% |
| | Prevention Signs | Count | 27 | 27 |
| | | % of Total | 6.4% | 6.4% |
| | Morality | Count | 4 | 4 |
| | | % of Total | 1.0% | 1.0% |
| | Regulations | Count | 21 | 21 |
| | | % of Total | 5.0% | 5.0% |
| Total | | Count | 421 | 421 |
| | | % of Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

On the other hand, the differences among the selected newspapers in the use of dominant frames suggest Nigeria's perceptions that the COVID-19 virus has little or no effect on Africans. Thus, this reinforces the power of framing as a mechanism for changing the public's views about the need for the media to use health education campaigns to help change people's mindset towards any epidemic (Li et al., 2020b). Similarly, the differences in the use of the dominant frames among the newspapers might demonstrate the laisse affaire attitude of journalists to hold the government and their cronies accountable due to fear of molestation, such as revoking of their operating license, arbitrary detention, and closure of their media organizations or because of corruption and political interests of their owners as some of them are politicians.

## DISCUSSION

The problems associated with the COVID-19 pandemic are no longer a new phenomenon. This study found that the sampled newspapers used twelve different news frames to cover the virus at varying intensities. This supports the views that media issues are often framed as economic issues/consequences, corruption, healthcare crisis, human interest, and regulations. These often attract empathy and sympathy from readers (Entman, 2004; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000).

Detecting the news frames used in the COVID-19 pandemic news coverage is the first step to know which one is used more than the other. For instance, our study found that the twelve frames used in news coverage on the virus differed significantly between

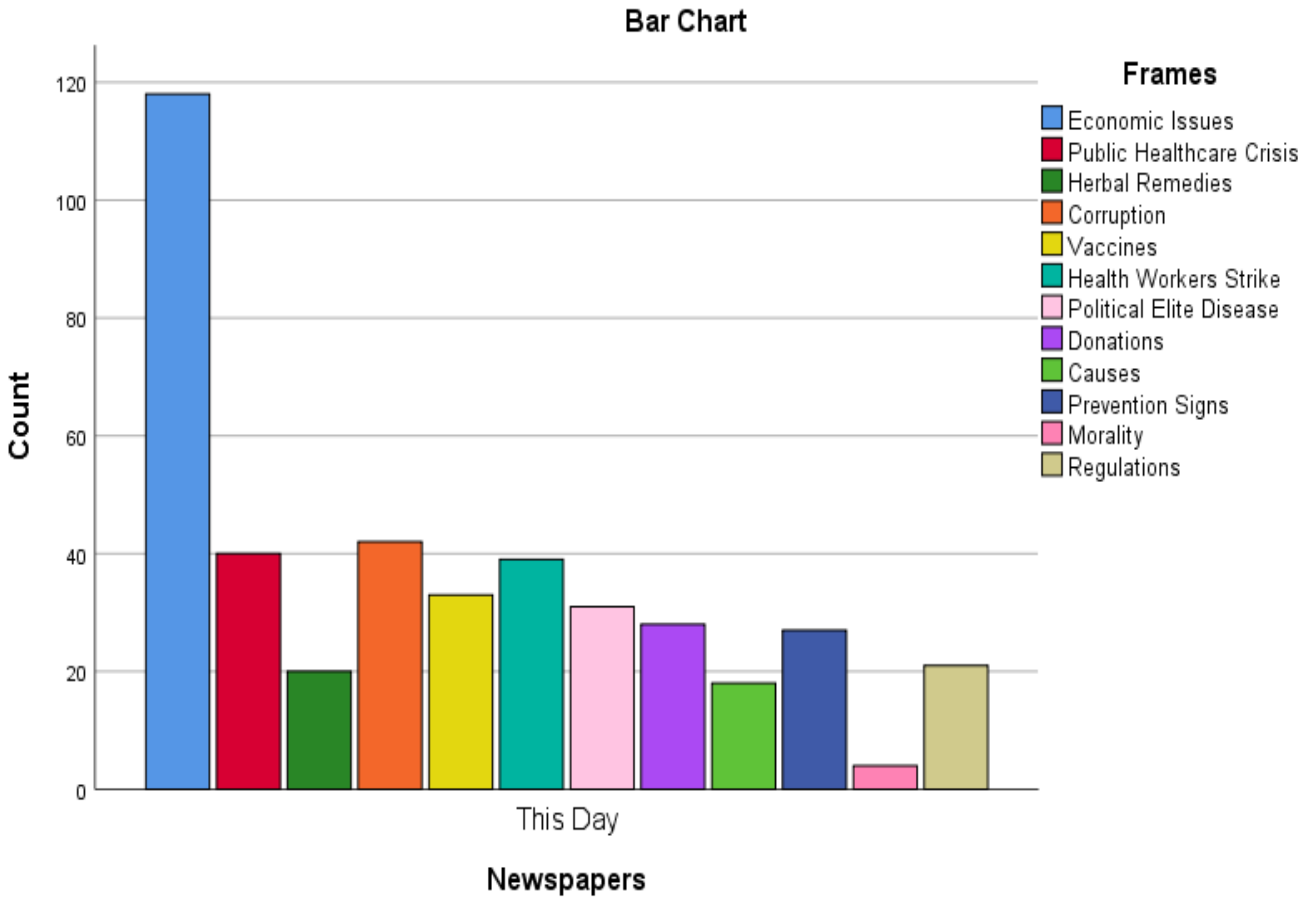


**Figure 5.** Showing the Bar chart of the kinds of Frames Used by the *ThisDay* Newspaper in the Coverage of the COVID-9 Pandemic from 01st January- 30th September 2020.

the six selected newspapers. *The Daily Sun* newspaper, for instance, used more of all the twelve news frames in the coverage of news on the virus than the other five newspapers within the period of study. Within the nine (9) months of the study, five significant news frames used in *The Daily Sun* newspaper were economic issues, public healthcare crisis, corruption, regulations, and elite politicians' diseases. Other significant frames used more by the same paper are health workers' strikes, donations, causes, prevention signs, vaccines, and herbal remedies. Here, corruption, public healthcare crisis, and regulations frames can be an arm of economic issues, causes, elite politicians' diseases, prevention signs, and morality frames drawn from the COVID-19 pandemic stories. The pattern suggests that journalists and news editors from the six selected newspapers blamed, empathized, and discussed the pandemic's impact in their reporting. Thus, based on the above, the selected newspapers used sensational headlines to draw Nigerians' attention to the dangers of the COVID-19 virus.

Four primary dominant frames mostly used in the remaining five newspapers were economic issues, healthcare crisis, corruption, and elite politicians' diseases. While herbal remedies, health workers' strikes, prevention signs, vaccines, causes, and morality were also used at varying degrees. Thus, the economic issues and health workers' strikes frames may be regarded as an offshoot of the healthcare crisis and corruption frames taken from the stories of the COVID-19 in the country. The trend indicates that journalists and news editors highlighted the COVID-19 problems in terms of costs and monetary consequences. It also shows that the selected papers blamed corruption as the primary

**Table 7**. Showing the kinds and frequency of frames used by the *Vanguard* Newspaper in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

| Frames * Newspapers Crosstabulation | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Newspapers | |
| | | | Vanguard | Total |
| Frames | Economic Issues | Count | 129 | 129 |
| | | % of Total | 31.9% | 31.9% |
| | Public Healthcare Crisis | Count | 50 | 50 |
| | | % of Total | 12.3% | 12.3% |
| | Herbal Remedies | Count | 13 | 13 |
| | | % of Total | 3.2% | 3.2% |
| | Corruption | Count | 51 | 51 |
| | | % of Total | 12.6% | 12.6% |
| | Vaccines | Count | 15 | 15 |
| | | % of Total | 3.7% | 3.7% |
| | Health Workers Strike | Count | 40 | 40 |
| | | % of Total | 9.9% | 9.9% |
| | Political Elite Disease | Count | 39 | 39 |
| | | % of Total | 9.6% | 9.6% |
| | Donations | Count | 12 | 12 |
| | | % of Total | 3.0% | 3.0% |
| | Causes | Count | 14 | 14 |
| | | % of Total | 3.5% | 3.5% |
| | Prevention Signs | Count | 10 | 10 |
| | | % of Total | 2.5% | 2.5% |
| | Morality | Count | 2 | 2 |
| | | % of Total | 0.5% | 0.5% |
| | Regulations | Count | 30 | 30 |
| | | % of Total | 7.4% | 7.4% |
| Total | | Count | 405 | 405 |
| | | % of Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

reason for ill-equipped hospitals and the human health impacts of the virus on the people in their news reports. Such news coverage from journalists went into the personal economic details of the affected members of the society, including the lockdown and closure of businesses, lack of modern medical facilities in the country, and thus scored higher on the economic issues, healthcare crisis, and corruption frames. Buttressing this point, (Al Weswasi, 2019) explained that the way health issues and other social anomalies are framed in the media might have significant consequences for public understanding of healthcare matters and related issues.

Subsequently, it is vital to state that all the six sampled newspapers used the least on morality in their coverage of the COVID-19 virus in Nigeria within the period of this study. The morality frame means a high degree of putting the issues, problems, or events in the situation of moral persuasions (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). Thus, since the morality frame relates to stories referring to faith and God, it is not expected to be a significant news frame on the pandemic. This is because it is not easy for journalists to give a moral message while adhering to the principles of objectivity in news reporting (De Vreese, 1999). The six selected newspapers used the twelve news frames to heighten and convey information about the adverse effects of COVID-19 in Nigeria. They used words such as lockdown destroys means of livelihood, the people need an economic bailout from the government, health problems caused by COVID-19 virus, and medical facilities in Nigeria are in shambles to draw the government's attention to the plight of the populace.

The researcher also considered the tones used in

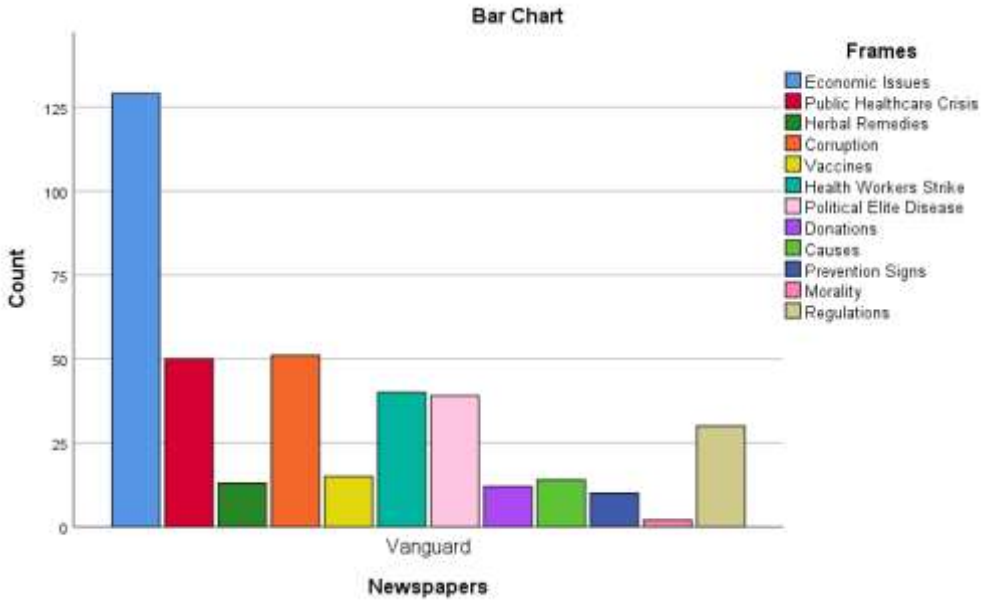


**Figure 6.** Showing the Bar chart of the kinds of Frames Used by the *Vanguard* Newspaper in the Coverage of the COVID-9 Pandemic from 01st January- 30th September 2020.

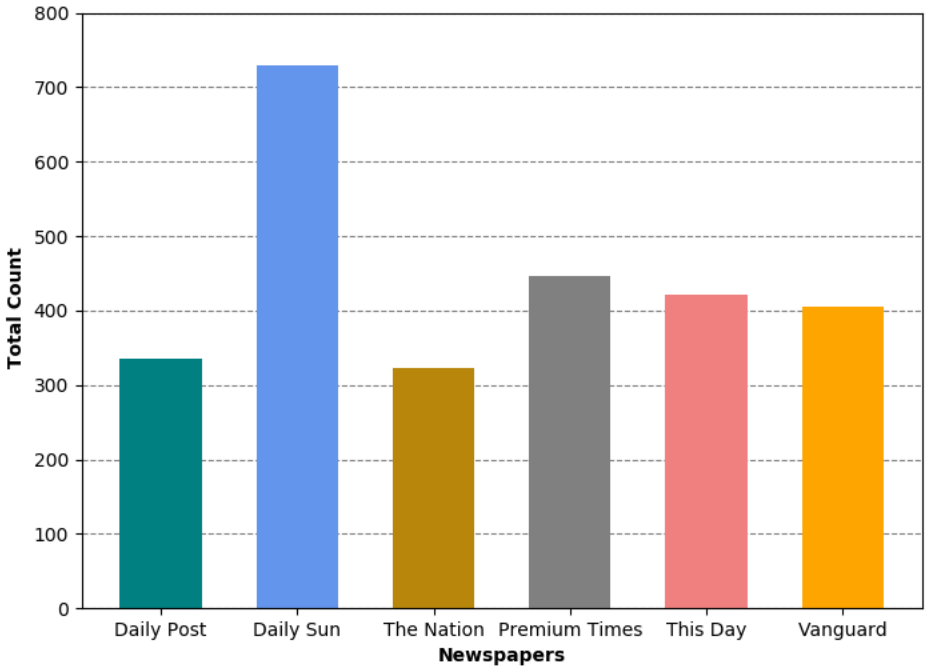


**Figure 7.** Showing the Bar chart of the Number of Frames Used by the *Vanguard* Newspaper in the Coverage of the COVID-9 Pandemic from 01st January- 30th September 2020.

framing the virus in the selected newspapers as well. The use of more negative tones than the positive and neutral tones to frame the COVID-19 pandemic in the selected newspapers provided empirical evidence to support the fact that journalists also echo their voices on public health issues. It also provides journalists

**Table 8**. Showing the Kinds and frequency of Tones used by the Six (6) selected Newspapers in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

| Newspapers * Frequency Crosstabulation | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Frequency | | | Total |
| | | | Positive | Negative | Neutral | |
| Newspapers | The Daily Post | Count | 36 | 296 | 4 | 336 |
| | | Expected Count | 53.4 | 279.9 | 2.7 | 336.0 |
| | | % of Total | 1.4% | 11.1% | 0.2% | 12.6% |
| | The Daily Sun | Count | 98 | 627 | 5 | 730 |
| | | Expected Count | 116.0 | 608.2 | 5.8 | 730.0 |
| | | % of Total | 3.7% | 23.6% | 0.2% | 27.4% |
| | The Nation | Count | 60 | 259 | 3 | 322 |
| | | Expected Count | 51.2 | 268.3 | 2.5 | 322.0 |
| | | % of Total | 2.3% | 9.7% | 0.1% | 12.1% |
| | Premium Times | Count | 71 | 373 | 3 | 447 |
| | | Expected Count | 71.1 | 372.4 | 3.5 | 447.0 |
| | | % of Total | 2.7% | 14.0% | 0.1% | 16.8% |
| | ThisDay | Count | 108 | 309 | 4 | 421 |
| | | Expected Count | 66.9 | 350.8 | 3.3 | 421.0 |
| | | % of Total | 4.1% | 11.6% | 0.2% | 15.8% |
| | The Punch | Count | 50 | 353 | 2 | 405 |
| | | Expected Count | 64.4 | 337.4 | 3.2 | 405.0 |
| | | % of Total | 1.9% | 13.3% | 0.1% | 15.2% |
| Total | | Count | 423 | 2217 | 21 | 2661 |
| | | Expected Count | 423.0 | 2217.0 | 21.0 | 2661.0 |
| | | % of Total | 15.9% | 83.3% | 0.8% | 100.0% |

with a forum to relay their views broadly than other forms of news media in the country. The idea of news framing is endorsed by (De Vreese, 1999), who states that news framing has rapidly become one of the most popular communication concepts, explaining the enormous rise in its usage. In the circumstances of the current study, the frame of the economic issue shows a scenario where journalists cannot avoid holding the COVID-19 pandemic as responsible for the economic crisis witnessed in the country or elsewhere. The predominance of the economic issues frame in the selected six newspapers indicates the significance and possible impacts of opinion leaders in the business community in framing the problems in the news media. For instance, in Nigeria, where there is persistent economic hardship due to the COVID-19 virus, the government, health experts, and business leaders must provide solutions to its problems. Besides, the economic issue frame might demonstrate journalists' unwillingness to hold the government and the political elites accountable due to fear of retribution from the government, such as revoking their operating license, arbitrary detention, and closure of their media organizations.

**The Implications of the Study**

As depicted in Tables 2-6 and Figures 1-8, the consequences of the outcome of this study are that the COVID-19 pandemic posed a severe threat to the Nigerian economy and the whole world in general. Based on this study's results, it is evident that through media framing, the people of Nigeria and elsewhere have already concluded that the COVID-19 virus is all about economic issues and politics. This supports the notion that the media provide essential information to the public through framing, which influences their understanding, decisions, and viewpoint about the issue (Princen, 2018; Wasike, 2017). The consequence is that through continued framing of an issue in a particular fashion by the media, the public is bound directly or indirectly to think in a like manner as canvased by the news

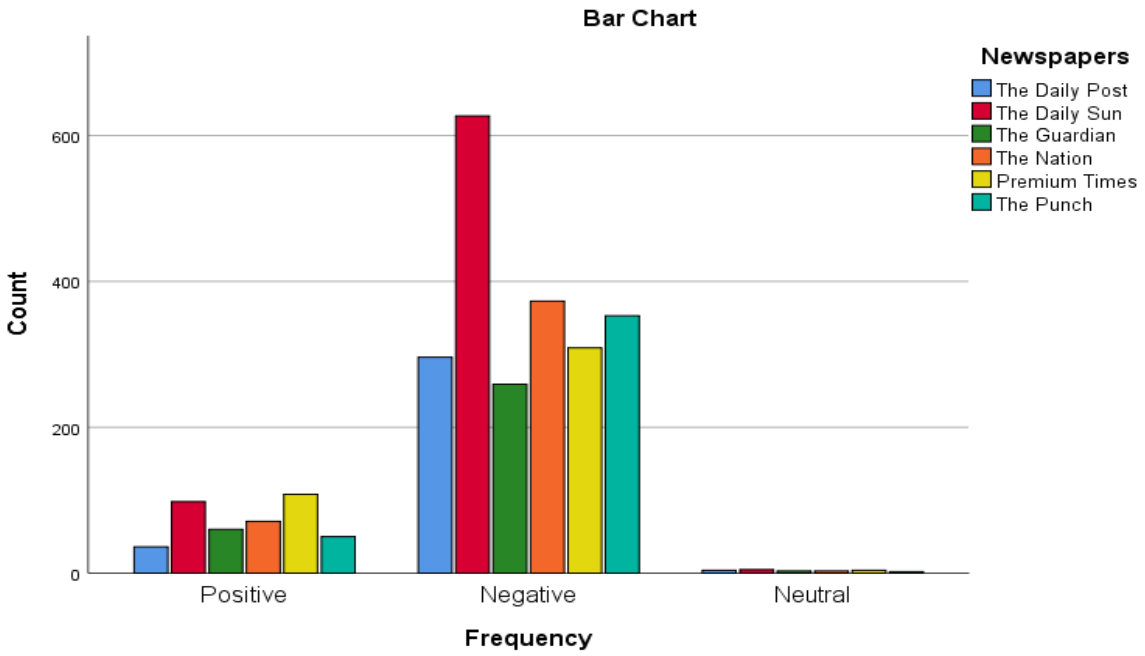


**Figure 8.** Showing the Bar chart of the Kinds of Tones Used by the selected Newspapers in the coverage of the COVID-9 Pandemic from 01st January- 30th September 2020.

media. This situation affirms theoretical media assumptions that framing involves emphasizing certain aspects of reality in a particular definition, interpretation, and evaluation. Certain viewpoints are projected through deploying frames while others are silenced (Fløttum and Gjerstad, 2017).

Therefore, this function reflects the powerful and influential nature of the media's role in influencing the public's behavior. This is because, according to (Cacciatore et al., 2016), the media is powerful and exerts influence, both directly and indirectly. Media exert influence directly by summoning an emotional or intellectual response and indirectly by controlling exposure to particular events and the complexity with which those events are reported. Thus, the media's powerful and influential position ensures that the public talks about the media. As a result, the media's powerful and influential role encompasses how specific topics are highlighted above others to gain widespread interest, increase public consciousness and behavioral change. Media's dominant role allows it easy to draw readers' attention by writing headlines of various sizes and shapes that make "big news tiny" and tiny news huge." This point provides a convincing case for media professionals who continuously bombard the public with relevant and up-to-date information to educate and influence public health matters such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The nature of the media's powerful and influential role requires that they give legitimacy and attract attention in their daily news reports to a public health problem such as the coronavirus. For instance, (Lin et al., 2020) observed that what caused fear and uncertainty about the COVID-19 virus is not merely worldwide deaths and numbers of infected persons. However, instead, the amount of extensive media-disseminated coronavirus information exacerbated the pandemic. As a consequence, the impacts of news coverage were undoubtedly felt by not only the viewers of the various news media outlets but also by the "man-in-the-street." In this respect, due to the press's powerful position, members of the public are more likely affected by their news media exposure. This is because society largely depends on the media's information and analysis to navigate crucial public health decisions like the COVID-19.

## CONCLUSION

It is not in doubt that the mass media such as radio, television, internet, newspapers, magazines, and journals play significant roles in framing public concerns. Hence, the media frame and present

national and international issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic the way they deem fit to the public irrespective of whether society holds contrary views or not. The six selected newspapers' COVID-19 pandemic coverage has shown how the media influence public opinion and set the agenda for public discussion. In this study, it imperative to note that *Daily Post*, *The Daily Sun, The Nation, Premium Times, This Day, and Vanguard* mostly framed the COVID-19 as economic issues and corruption, deemphasizing frames such as public healthcare crisis, elites politicians disease, health workers strike, donations, and regulations. Accordingly, the media would always frame and present issues in such a manner that suits their agenda, notwithstanding what is at stake. Thus, the way the media frame and present public importance issues like the COVID-19 in a particular context gives them the privilege to sway public opinion in a specific direction.

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